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ABSTRACT

The paper asserts that a scientifically structured curriculum is the basis of successful teaching of gifted pupils and that guidelines for teaching strategies within this curriculum should be set out. A self-study approach is considered as one effective way to help gifted learners master basic knowledge. Contributions of such components as group discussions, seminars, and simulation games are considered. Student research projects or independent study tasks are another component of the self-study approach. A three-page bibliography is included. (CL)

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PLANNING TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR THE GIFTED - A CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENTAL TASK

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ABSTRACT

Guidelines for teaching strategies in the curriculum document for the gifted should take the form of a selfstudy plan. This plan consists of the following interacting components: selfstudy modules; opportunities for seminars and simulation games and research. Although the concept self is used repeatedly, the role of the teacher or implementor of the curriculum is seen as of cardinal importance in accompanying the learner to the goal of educative instruction.

Successful teaching of gifted pupils does not start with a creative and sensitive teacher in the classroom in the first place, but with a scientifically structured curriculum, in which amongst other things, guidelines for teaching strategies are set out.

Through the flexible and integrated application of teaching models the unique bunching of possibilities of giftedness in the pupil will be optimally developed.

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PLANNING TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR THE GIFTED - A CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENTAL TASK

1. ORIENTATION

The development of a curriculum for the gifted pupil includes the identification and establishment of teaching strategies as guidelines for the implementation in teaching-learning situations. These teaching strategies are basic and universal. In planning teaching-learning situations for a specific group of gifted pupils the teacher applies the basic strategies to the particular situation.

In order to establish suitable teaching strategies in curriculum development (specifically on the macro-level) the curriculator must have a clear concept of who the gifted learner is and which goals are set for such a curriculum. Because of the way the theme of this paper has been formulated a few goals for the curriculum will be pointed out only, since these are a factor in determining the validity of proposals for teaching strategies.

2. GOALS/AIMS

The goals for a curriculum for gifted pupils should include the following:

2.1 Gaining and developing basic knowledge, creative thought, knowledge and skills at one's own rate, bearing in mind the criterion, purposefully, systematically and in an individualized way;

2.2 identifying, simulating and discussing topical questions in groups; and

2.3 individual or team research on problems encountered in real life.

3. TEACHING STRATEGIES

Comprehensive teaching strategies are necessary in order to strive after the above-mentioned goals with success. On the whole the available literature is usually aimed at a teaching strategy which realizes only one of the goals mentioned. A curriculating model should, however, establish teaching strategies aimed at realizing all the goals. In this way the person who implements the curriculum will be led to striving after a comprehensive teaching plan in practice.

In the following argument the components of a proposed comprehensive teaching strategy, viz. the self-study plan, are set out.

3.2 The self-study plan for gifted pupils

The plan could be presented as follows:

Subsequently each component of the plan will be looked at.

3.2.1 Selfstudy modules

Renzulli and Smith[1] take as a point of departure that for their "individualized educational programs (IEP) for gifted and talented students" opportunities must be provided to acquire basic knowledge at their own rate. Phase two of the IEP-model uses the so called "compacting" strategy to work through basic knowledge in the standard curriculum at an increased rate. In this way time becomes available for activities directed at enrichment.

Tennant's "extension model"[2] also underlines the importance for gifted pupils of first mastering the basic knowledge and concepts of the ordinary curriculum before entering on any enriching activities.

Thus in both the Renzulli-Smith and the Tennant models account is given of the first goal for a curriculum for the gifted (cf. par. 2.1)

Keller's "Personalized System of Instruction PSI"[3] is most suitable for pupils to complete the ordinary curriculum at their own rate, individually and keeping in mind the criteria. The learning material is divided into modules, goals and questions are set for each module and a criterion is set for passing. After taking a test there is an opportunity for remedial work in a personal interview with the teacher.

The application of PSI or programmed teaching for gifted pupils should only be aimed at the acquisition of basic knowledge, since research by Rosenberg and Ehrgott in 1973[4] reveals that programmed teaching for the gifted holds little real challenge and can lead to a drop in motivation: "the reinforcement schedule inherent in programmed instruction may make

it boring to the gifted learner". Although Parke quotes more research by Crutchfield and Covington (1966) on the possible disadvantages of self-teaching programmes, he comes to the conclusion that there are not enough research data available to deny outright the value of these programmes for the gifted.

Our own research (1984) has shown the value of self-study modules for gifted learners in mastering basic knowledge.

3.2.2 Group discussions

Renzulli[1] describes the value of group discussions for gifted pupils as follows: "Group training activities provide students with the skills and abilities necessary to solve problems in a variety of areas. Since gifted students are characterized by both a wide range of interests and an investigative attitude, systematic experiences in the thinking and feeling processes are necessary tools for more advanced types of inquiry".

Subsequently attention will be given to two forms of group discussions, viz. opportunities for seminars and simulations.

3.2.2.1 Seminars

A curriculum document giving broad guidelines for group discussions to teachers, should put a high premium on opportunities for seminars as a strategy of enrichment.

The first step in planning a seminar is to assess the areas of common interest to the pupils, which may cover more than one field of knowledge.

interest questionnaires, autobiographies or orientating interviews are means of identifying these[5].

The second step for the teacher is preparing a set of questions on the theme of the seminar. These questions are only intended to serve as a broad framework for the discussion and are aimed at diversive and creative answering by the pupils.

In the third instance the teacher gives a short, motivating introduction to the seminar. Sometimes this may be done by pupils. The questions can be given to the pupils at this stage or in advance. The main point is that the teacher should take a teaching and educating role in the teaching of the gifted. Kaplan[6] points out how important this is: "An appropriate curriculum for the gifted balances teacher and student-directed learning experience. . ."

In the fourth instance members of groups work together in think-tanks or horseshoe groups to find solutions to the set problems.

Lastly solutions are reported and defended.

3.2.2.2 Simulation games

The functioning of certain institutions or groups in society is simulated. For instance in Economics pupils can be divided into teams with the task of determining the most effective use of manpower in a firm[7].

Nelson[8] finds simulation games one of the most powerful means of opening up the potential of gifted pupils: "These media are made for the gifted because they accommodate and exercise the child's superior creativity, imagination, wide-ranging interests and abilities, and limitless energy".

3.2.3 Research

In the curriculum for gifted learners the initiating, planning and implementing of individual and group research as a teaching strategy form important components (cf. Renzulli's type 3 enrichment)*2

Ackerman [9] emphasises the group discussion as an opportunity for preparing the pupil for singling out a problem of his own choice for further thought. This is affirmed by the results of the research done by Briscoe[10]. She found that "independent study is best used with students who are already somewhat selfdirected. Underachievers may have a difficult time with the suddenness of such freedom". Thus the first two components of the self study plan (cf. par. 3.2) are important orientating phases for tackling one's own research effectively.

The role of the teacher in preparing and accompanying the pupil in the research project, is emphasised by several experts[11]. Davis et al.[12] for example show that gifted pupils in Biology who have been taught according to a combination of "teacher-directed" and "independent study" - strategies, fared considerably better in a standardised Biology test than pupils who had worked solely on an independent study plan.

The teacher plans and directs the pupils' progress in research according to pre-planned steps and procedures. Firestien and Treffinger[13] propose the following steps in creative problem-solving by research: fact-finding; problem-finding; idea-finding; solution-finding; acceptance-finding. The latter denotes a plan for making results available and implementing solutions to the problem.

* In the literature this research component is usually referred to as independent study methods.

4. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Guidelines for teaching strategies in the curriculum document for the gifted should take the form of a selfstudy plan. This plan consists of the following interacting components: selfstudy modules; opportunities for seminars and simulation games and research. Although the concept self is used repeatedly, the role of the teacher or implementor of the curriculum is seen as of cardinal importance in accompanying the learner to the goal of educative instruction.

Successful teaching of gifted pupils does not start with a creative and sensitive teacher in the classroom in the first place, but with a scientifically structured curriculum, in which amongst other things, guidelines for teaching strategies are set out.

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